

THIS WEEK IN BUSINESS

It's serious business Caricaturist expands business with classes

By Linda Saulnier
TOWNSMAN STAFF

As one parent described Rich Parsons' caricatures, they not only pick up the likeness of a person, they pick up the spirit.

That statement was from a mother of a young boy who wanted a cartoonist at his birthday party. And he wasn't disappointed, she said. It worked wonderfully and the kids loved the caricatures.

Caricatures for birthday parties, bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs, corporate

functions and anniversaries — that's entertainment, Rick Parsons style. He sets up his easel and deftly captures the people attending the event. Or, perhaps just the guest of honor. The host decides.

Parsons recently relocated his business, Just in Jest, from Natick to 471 Washington St., Wellesley. There, he runs the entertainment part of his business and also offers classes in cartooning for children. Beginning June 3, Parsons will also operate a cart on weekends near the food court at the Prudential Center.

There are as many aspects to Par-

son's business as there are caricatures to choose from. And he enjoys juggling every one of them.

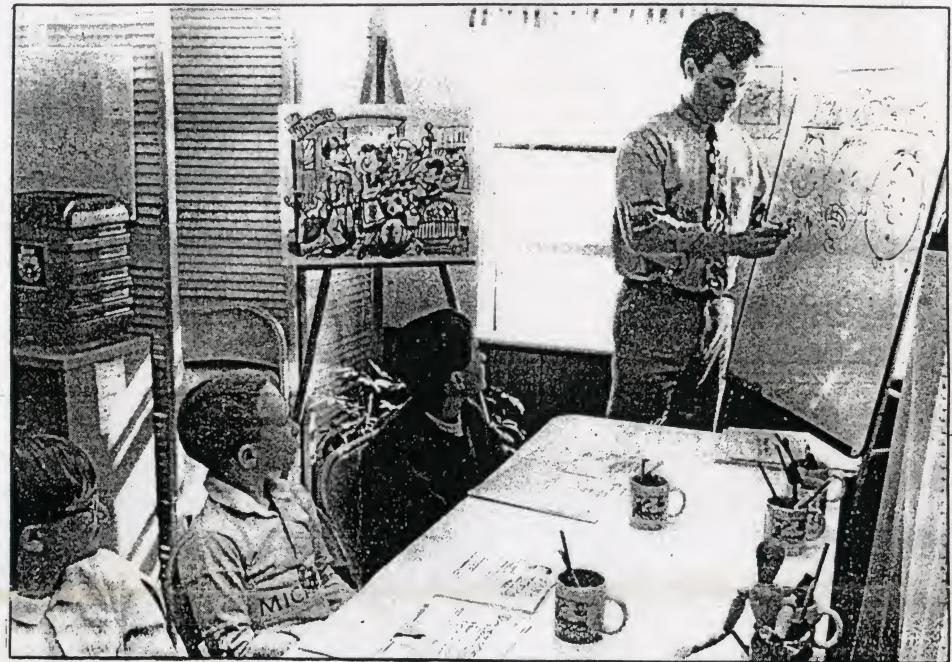
Parsons began his life's work at the age of 10 when his doodling turned into marketable cartoons. He continued cartooning and drawing caricatures through high school and even presented a cartoon slide show for classinates before he graduated in 1979. He also designed the cover of his yearbook, which was chosen recently for the Natick Mall time capsule.

But then, what better way for a time capsule to preserve the 1970s for posterity than through Parsons' caricatures? Illustrated on the yearbook cover in a wheel of fortune are the decade's main events — Nixon with Watergate tapes juxtaposed behind his head, the Red Sox' 1975 pennant win and the Blizzard of '78 — among others.

After high school, Parsons went on to graduate from Framingham State College in 1983 with a degree in fine arts. He did some television work while he was living in Atlanta where he created "Lil Angelo," a cartoon character for an Atlanta cable station that was seen in 30 million homes. Locally, his cartoons and illustrations have been published over the years in several newspapers including the Townsman.

"I've always liked to draw. But I've never been able to express my real feelings in my drawings. This class has unlocked my potential."

STUDENT JAY CROSS



Matthew Bramante, left, Chris Rosser and Jay Cross, attend cartoon classes taught by Rick Parsons at his studio on Washington Street. Cartoons and caricatures are some aspects of Parsons' business, Just in Jest. TOWNSMAN PHOTO BY OTA RICHTER

For parties, Parsons compares himself to a pianist or any other entertainer. He tries to complement a party, not detract from it. For children's parties, he discusses details with parents such as to who will have their caricatures done.

"Sometimes children get jealous if everyone doesn't get a caricature," he said.

But Parsons said parents can be guided by their budget. He also does signature boards and has a number of other alternatives to individual caricatures.

With adults, he said with a grin, it's usually not a question of whether they want to have their caricature done but whether they like it.

"Most people aren't used to seeing their profile, so usually, if a person doesn't think I've drawn a likeness, it's of their profile," Parsons said. "But then, their friends will say it looks just like them."

When business really booms he sometimes has to hire other artists, but he said they are screened and closely match his style and talent.

The cartoon classes that he offers at his studio will begin the second session next week. Classes are on Thursday afternoons from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m., Friday from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. and last session, he added a class on Monday. Class size is small, he said.

One of the reasons he decided to give classes stems from his own wish to have known other cartoonists when he was a youngster just to bounce ideas off. His classes have that type of motivational atmosphere, he said. And his students are in enthusiastic agreement.

Jay Cross, 12, a member of his Monday class, said, "I've always liked to draw. But I've never been able to express my real feelings in my drawings. This class has unlocked my potential."

And Matthew Bramante, 10, said he thinks a lot of people would like to learn to draw cartoons but just don't get the opportunity.

"I wanted to learn and now I got to," he said. "Rich Parsons is a very good teacher."

And Chris Rosser, 8, is in it for the fun. But he said the class also helps him think about his future. "It makes me think about what my career could be and it helps me so I can be ready," he said.

"I've put a lot of thought into this business," Parsons said, sitting and sketching during an interview in his brightly lit studio. Parsons is always sketching. Not just in jest.